

Ethics Guidance for Letters of Recommendation

Executive Branch employees must consult 5 CFR § 2635.702 and 18 USC §205 before using their official title in a letter of recommendation for friends or colleagues to prevent misuse of the employee's public office for personal gain.

Follow the flowchart below to determine if you can write a letter of recommendation and use your official title.

START

Is the United States the intended recipient of letter of recommendation?

YES

NO

Is the individual one of your supervisors or able to influence the content of your letter of recommendation?

NO

YES

Is the letter of recommendation for an employment opportunity or character reference?

Do you have firsthand knowledge of the individual's ability and character?

NO

NO

YES

No, you may not write a letter of recommendation for an individual who may influence the content of your letter.
See 18 U.S.C. §205(a)(2)

No, you should only write a letter of recommendation for an individual you know well.

Do you have personal knowledge of the ability or character of the individual from working with them during your federal employment?

NO

YES

Yes, you may write a letter of recommendation for this individual using your official title or office stationery.
See 5 C.F.R. 2635.702(b)

Are you recommending the individual for federal employment?

YES

NO

No, you may not write a letter of recommendation for this individual using your official title, position, or authority. You may write a letter in your personal capacity.